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ABSTRACT

This guide, written in simple language appropriate for young children, uses a direct, conversational style to explain Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), how safely and comfortably to be with individuals who have AIDS, and how to avoid contracting the disease. The text is in the voice of an 11-year-old girl whose uncle died of AIDS. It emphasizes that people with AIDS are not to be feared and that AIDS is carried in the bloodstream and spread between individuals through direct contact with infected blood. The text deals with many practical issues of every day life related to AIDS prevention: it is not possible to see whether people have AIDS by looking at them; how to be safe with needles (no to "blood brother" rituals based on finger pricking, yes to a doctor's clean, sing-use needle); blood used in hospitals is tested and safe; and what to do when someone is bleeding and needs help. (JB)

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Jenny's ABC's

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AIDS, Blood, and Children

A Guide for Adults to Read with Elementary Age Children

by
Christine Simpson

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My name is Jenny. When I was eleven years old, my Uncle Paul died from AIDS. It was very sad. Uncle Paul was very special in my life. Right before he died, I bought a golden heart-shaped locket. It helps me remember him. My locket makes me happy. So do my memories.

AIDS can be scary if you don't understand it. But there is great news about AIDS for you and me. The great news is that you never have to get this disease. Neither do I! If we know how to stay safe, we will never get AIDS.

Think of it this way. Getting AIDS is not like playing a game of tag. AIDS does not "chase" you until it "tags" you! Maybe a cold or the flu "chases" you and "tags" you, but not AIDS.

Nope. No way! AIDS does not get *you*. *You* have to get *it*! That's the great news. And you have to get it in a very certain way. The special AIDS "germ" has to get into your blood. Not just on your hand or on your toe or in the air. But into *your blood*.

This makes it easier to stay safe. People with AIDS have the special "germ" in their blood. If their blood touches your blood, you can get the AIDS "germ."

However, you cannot really tell who has AIDS just by looking at them. People with AIDS often look very healthy. Uncle Paul did. He looked terrific for years. AIDS is weird that way.

So, the absolute best way to be safe at your age is to keep away from everybody's blood. You simply cannot always tell just by looking at someone whether their blood is safe. But, even if someone has AIDS, you do not have to stay away from *them* -- just their *blood*.

So, the big rule is never touch *anyone's* blood except your own. That's a big start to staying healthy...and to never getting AIDS. Just to be sure, I don't even touch my mom's blood or my dad's or my brother's. No one's! That keeps **me** safe from the AIDS "germ."

My best friend sleeps over at my house a lot. One day she forgot her toothbrush. In the morning, she asked to use mine. I told her that I really liked her, but it just isn't healthy to share toothbrushes. I don't share my toothbrush with anyone, not even people in my family.

I don't want to give anyone my germs, and I don't want theirs. I know I cannot get AIDS from spit. But, gums do bleed when you brush your teeth. I know to stay away from everyone's

blood, even my best friend's. So, I don't share my toothbrush. That keeps **me** safe.

Ted is my younger brother. One night at dinner, he told us about blood brothers and sisters in school. Some of the kids at school wanted to prick their fingers with pins and smoosh their blood together. That makes them blood brothers and blood sisters.

Ted knows that is a terrible idea. He told his friends not to smoosh their blood. They could pass the AIDS "germ" and not even know it. Ted never touches other people's blood -- not even my mom's, my dad's, or mine. No one's! That keeps **him** safe.

But what else about pins? My older cousin likes sewing class

in junior high school. Last week she said some of the kids were goofing around in class. They were playing jokes on each other. They stuck a bunch of kids with the same pin.

Boy, that is a dumb thing to do! I guess they weren't thinking, That takes blood from one kid and gives it to another. My cousin knows never to touch other people's blood -- not even my mom's, my dad's, my brother's, or mine. No one's. That keeps **her** safe.

Needles are safe only if one person uses them. Getting shots at the doctor's *is* safe because your doctor uses a new needle every time. Sure, shots may hurt! But the needles are clean. That keeps **you** safe from the AIDS "germ."

My mom got a small butterfly tatooed on her ankle. She made sure that a new needle was used. She doesn't want blood from another person getting in her body. She never touches other people's blood -- not even my dad's, my brother's, or mine. And certainly not a stranger's when she gets a tatoo. That keeps **her** safe from the AIDS "germ."

What should you do if you find a needle? On the street...on the beach...anywhere. Don't ever play with it! It could hurt you in many ways.

First it could stick you -- OUCH! But more importantly, it might have blood on it. If it sticks you, you could get someone else's blood in you. And you don't know if that blood has the AIDS "germ" in it. So, never touch things, like needles, that could have blood on them. That also keeps **you** safe from the AIDS "germ."

Sometimes it *is* safe to touch other people's blood. Blood used in hospitals is very safe. All the blood given

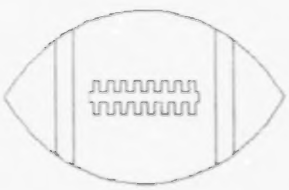
in hospitals is checked for the AIDS "germ" before it is used. The blood for hospitals is safer than it has ever been before. That keeps **all of us** safe.

Doctors and nurses in hospitals wear special gloves when they work around blood. Your dentist does, too, because your gums bleed. The AIDS "germ" cannot get through these special gloves. That keeps **nurses and doctors and dentists** safe. Because they are careful, **we** are safe.

But what should you do if you are around someone else's blood? Remember, you never *really* know for sure if their blood is safe. Maybe your friend cut his knee on the playground. Or maybe your aunt fell off her bike and her arm is bleeding.

There are safe ways to help bleeding people. If your friend's cut is not too bad, the best thing to do is to get an adult. Run

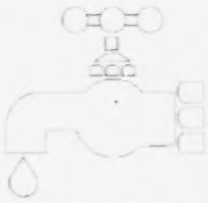
for help. Teachers and nurses in schools have the special gloves to wear to protect themselves from the AIDS "germ." They know how to help children in schools. Coaches should, too, if you play sports.



But what if an adult isn't around and the person really needs help? What if your aunt is bleeding so much that she needs help right away? The safest thing to do is to give your aunt her

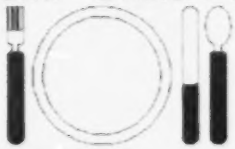
jacket or your jacket. Hand the jacket to *her.* Then *she* can put it on her blood and hold it in place there.

What if your aunt is too hurt to do that? Bunch up a piece of clothing, put it on her arm, and hold it there for her. Just don't touch her blood directly. Be careful that the blood isn't getting through the clothing to your hands. That keeps **you and your aunt** safe.



If you do get blood on your skin, be sure to wash it off *right away* with soap and water. If you have no cuts in your skin at that spot, you will be all right. Washing with soap and water is always a good idea. It gets rid of many germs besides AIDS. That keeps **you** safe.

The time may come when a friend or a relative of yours has AIDS. I hope this never happens to you, but it could. It happened to me with my Uncle Paul. It was very sad.

Remember, it *is* safe to be around people with AIDS and to cuddle with them and to share with them. Uncle Paul slept in my bed. We all ate with the same  forks and spoons and knives. I kissed him all the time. We carved pumpkins together and had chicken fights and did all kinds of neat things.

But I *never* touched his blood. I might have had a cut in my skin. If Uncle Paul's blood had touched my blood, I would have gotten AIDS. My parents taught me how to stay safe.

People with AIDS are very nice people. They live in all parts of our country. It is safe to be around them. Just be careful not to touch their blood. Then **you** will be safe, too.

A lot is known about AIDS. What isn't known is how to cure it. Until they find a cure, we must keep ourselves safe.

I know not to touch blood that is not mine. So do my brother, and my mom, and my dad. So does my best friend. So does my cousin, and my nurse, and my doctor, and my dentist, and my teacher, and my coach. And, now, so do **YOU**!

About the Author

Christine Simpson is a nationally certified school psychologist who has worked directly with thousands of children in schools. She is a sought-after AIDS prevention/sensitivity presenter, speaking to assemblies, professional groups, community forums, and conventions, and appearing on radio and tele-vision. In addition, as a consultant with a national firm, she trains and presents throughout the country concerning numerous educational, clinical, and interpersonal issues. Christine has authored professional texts and materials, as well as children's books. Her nationally acclaimed children's book on AIDS, Jenny's Locket, is her own children's true story about the loss of their uncle to AIDS (available from Pearl Press, 800-335-6881). Jenny's Locket uniquely shares the emotional side of AIDS, touching both children and adults alike. Her fictional books for children, Puppy Love, Bouquets, and Lucky Eyes, focus on tolerance, acceptance, and individual differences. Christine lives with her husband and two children in Nazareth, Pennsylvania.

A Note to Adults

My original book on AIDS, Jenny's Locket, is appropriate for ages 10 - 100. After it was published, parents and teachers asked, "What about the younger children?" This guide, Jenny's ABC's, is my answer for the younger children. I intentionally use the term AIDS "germ" because I believe primary and elementary age children relate better to that word. However, if your child understands the term, "virus," by all means substitute that word wherever I use "germ."

HIV is the virus ("germ") that eventually results in AIDS. HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. This virus attacks the immune system. When the immune system is sufficiently weakened, infections that you can normally fight off seize the "opportunity" to take over your body. Once you get one of twenty five identified "opportunistic infections," you are officially considered a person with AIDS. AIDS stands for acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. AIDS is the end result of HIV.

When your child is old enough, please continue his or her HIV and AIDS prevention education by explaining the other sources of HIV. It was a conscious decision on my part to limit this book's scope to blood issues only. However, ongoing, age-appropriate education is necessary to assure the safety of everyone.

I wish you and your loved ones a healthy future. -- CPS